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Shakespeare and the Implications of Paratextual Attribution

Amy Lidster

In 1598, Shakespeare's name first appeared – unambiguously – on the title pages of printed playbooks, with the second editions of *Richard II* and *Richard III*, both published by Andrew Wise, and the first extant edition of *Love's Labour's Lost*, published by Cuthbert Burby.¹ These paratextual attributions have generated considerable critical interest and are often used to suggest the increasing status of commercial drama and of Shakespeare's position as the most published professional dramatist at the end of the sixteenth century. In this paper, I will consider some of the wider implications of these attributions, exploring how they might relate to the selection and survival of plays, the influence of patronage networks, and the interrelations between dramatic and non-dramatic texts.

While studies in attribution have often focused on Burby's publication of *Love's Labour's Lost* (perhaps because it is the first extant edition of the play), I will concentrate on the editions published by Andrew Wise, as these quartos point to a more developed, consistent, and specific strategy in relation to authorial attribution. Indeed, Wise's output and publishing connections deserve more concentrated critical attention, having further significance beyond the immediate issue of attribution. As part of this case study, I will draw attention to the role of multiple agents in the transmission and presentation of plays from the professional theatres in print, and highlight the process's collaborative and cumulative nature. I will move away from discussions of attribution that focus on narrowing authorial options and agency, to one that expands the range of contributors to include a plurality of producers that are active throughout the transmission of a text. I will focus especially on the role of publishers because a contrastive analysis of these individuals and their outputs shows they exerted considerable influence on the selection, investment, and presentation of plays in print, which is of great importance when looking at Shakespearean attributions and publication patterns.²

To demonstrate the particular significance of Andrew Wise as an early publisher of Shakespeare, a brief consideration of Cuthbert Burby's practices offers a useful contrast. While Burby was one of the main stationers involved in the publication of commercial plays during the 1590s, responsible for playbooks such

as *Orlando Furioso*, *Mother Bombie*, *The Cobbler's Prophecy*, *The Taming of a Shrew*, and the second edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, his dramatic output does not prioritize Shakespeare's plays nor authorial attributions. Aside from *Love's Labour's Lost*, his only other play to contain a title-page attribution is *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (to "Robert Wilson, Gent."), and, significantly, the full attribution in *Love's Labour's Lost* reads "Newly corrected and augmented | By W. Shakespere," which spatially and implicitly aligns Shakespeare's name more directly with the processes of correction and expansion, rather than initial authorship.

Andrew Wise, on the other hand, exclusively published plays by Shakespeare, all of which were associated with the Chamberlain's Men. Regardless of whether it was Burby's edition of *Love's Labour's Lost* or one of Wise's reprints that first appeared on bookstalls with a paratextual attribution in 1598, it is Wise's publication practices that are especially significant for understanding Shakespearean attribution and publication. Wise's entire output of dramatic publications consists of multiple editions of *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *I Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, with a total of eleven separate editions between 1597 and 1602.³ From 1598 onwards, the title pages of these editions consistently describe the plays as "By William Shakespeare." The one exception is the presentation of *I Henry IV*, which, from its third edition in 1599, claims the play was "Newly corrected by W. Shake-speare," likely relating to sensitivity surrounding the Oldcastle controversy, and a desire to curtail attributive claims and emphasize the play's "corrected" state. Unlike Burby's publication patterns, the Wise quartos exhibit regularity and uniformity in their presentation, suggesting these plays are part of a considered strategy. Wise was also the first stationer to include Shakespeare's name as part of an entry in the Stationers' Register (for the second part of *Henry IV* and *Much Ado About Nothing* on 23 August 1600). Perhaps even more significantly, Wise's title pages (through their *mise en page*) connected, for the first time, Shakespeare's name with corresponding attributions to the Chamberlain's Men and, by extension, to a powerful literary and theatrical patron, George Carey, second Baron Hunsdon, who was Lord Chamberlain from 1597 and patron of Shakespeare's company from 1596.

This title-page link between dramatist, theatrical company, and patron was relatively uncommon at this stage in the presentation of professional playbooks. The earliest examples date from 1594, in Robert

Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, Thomas Lodge's *Wounds of Civil War*, Marlowe and Nashe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, and Marlowe's *Edward II*. These title pages implicitly associate their advertised dramatists with companies and aristocratic or royal patrons, while also containing assertions of their dramatists' gentlemanly status or university education, suggesting an attempt to elevate the status of the playbooks through these connections. Andrew Wise was the first publisher to associate Shakespeare's name with a patron and theatrical company, and these earlier playbook precedents provide a contextual framework from which to view Wise's attributions. However, these paratexts also gesture towards the existence of a patronage network involving George Carey, Shakespeare, and Andrew Wise. As Sonia Massai has argued, a consideration of Wise's larger output shows that he specialized in texts by writers under the direct patronage of George Carey (namely, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Playfere, and Shakespeare, as the leading dramatist from the Chamberlain's Men), suggesting that a patronal connection may have motivated the publication of Shakespeare's plays, as well as their attributive claims.⁴ Significantly supporting this idea, Wise embarked on his dramatic publications almost immediately after George Carey's investiture as Lord Chamberlain in April 1597, entering *Richard II* in the Stationers' Register on 29 August 1597.

From these brief considerations – specifically, the concentration of Wise's output, the association between Wise, George Carey, and the Chamberlain's Men, the timing of the publications and Stationers' Register entries, and the consistency in printed presentation – the Shakespearean attributions in the Wise quartos can be seen as pointing towards a patronage network that has influenced the selection and presentation of these plays in print, as well as our understanding of the relationship between published texts and wider performance repertoires. The phenomenal success of the Wise quartos (judging by their reprint rates) likely encouraged the publication of other plays by Shakespeare, including reprints of *The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* in 1600, as well as new Shakespearean first editions with further title-page attributions, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1600 and *Hamlet* in 1603. Indeed, the dominance of Shakespearean playbooks at the end of the sixteenth century (consisting of approximately twenty-two separate editions) has had significant repercussions for assessing the larger performance repertory of the Chamberlain's Men and other companies. Too often, publication patterns are seen as reflecting performance patterns, whereas

evidence from lost plays during the late 1590s reveals that a considerable number of plays, dramatists, and repertory patterns have been overlooked as a result of the dominance of Shakespeare in print, arising particularly from these Wise quartos.

The presentation of the Wise editions and their title-page attributions also draw attention to the overlap between aristocratic patronage and commercial considerations in the transmission of plays. While critics including Adam Hooks and Kathleen McLuskie have explored the connections between these two areas of influence, Wise's quartos help to break down the distinction that is still often maintained between patronal and commercial motivations, demonstrating a synergetic relationship between these strategies, which is especially apparent through Wise's position within London's literary landscape.⁵ Wise was a publisher and bookseller by trade, and throughout his entire documented career (from 1593 to 1603), he operated at the Sign of the Angel in the north-east corner of St Paul's Churchyard. Through Wise's publications and those of his neighbouring stationers at the White Greyhound during the 1590s, this area emerged as the centre of Shakespearean wholesale in London, as well as the locus of Shakespearean paratextual attribution, which in all cases connected Shakespeare with a particular aristocratic patron. Before 1598, Shakespeare's name had only been associated in print with his two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, first published in 1593 and 1594 respectively, and containing signed dedications by Shakespeare to his patron, Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton. These editions and some of their numerous reprints were published by John Harrison and later William Leake, and were sold at the Sign of the White Greyhound, just three doors (or about twenty feet) away from Wise's shop in Paul's Churchyard. Reflecting the interconnected influences that shape the presentation of playbooks, it is likely that Wise's paratexts were at least partly informed by the success and strategies of the earlier narrative poems, while remaining predominately motivated by the publication network involving Wise, George Carey, and the Chamberlain's Men.⁶ By the late 1590s, this small section of St Paul's between the signs of the Angel and the White Greyhound could well have been associated in the minds of stationers and readers with the publication of the majority of Shakespeare's dramatic *and* non-dramatic works, with no other part of London exhibiting a similar concentration at this time.

This claim for a reciprocal connection between Shakespeare's dramatic and non-dramatic texts is further supported by the publication of *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599. Up until this time, Shakespeare's name had only appeared on the title pages of his printed *playbooks*, with the narrative poems containing signed dedications, which was common practice with poetic collections. However, in 1599, *The Passionate Pilgrim* became the first non-dramatic text attributed to Shakespeare on its title page (described as "By W. Shakespeare").⁷ The collection was printed for William Leake and offered for wholesale purchase, along with the narrative poems, at the White Greyhound. Given the geographical proximity of the bookshops, it is likely that the Wise quartos and their printed presentation and success influenced *The Passionate Pilgrim's* title-page attribution, thus furthering the link between these two bookshops and their stationers, and the association of this area of St Paul's with Shakespeare as an attributed writer of dramatic and non-dramatic texts.

In summary, this case study of Shakespearean playbook attribution in the late 1590s has attempted to move away from attribution as a means of circumscribing agency and narrowing discussions of collaboration, and instead has suggested that such paratextual attributions often gesture towards a range of producers and influences that have shaped the transmission of a play. The quartos published by Andrew Wise between 1597 and 1602 are particularly revealing for understanding Shakespearean publication, pointing to the existence of a patronage network that possibly informed the selection and presentation of these plays, and highlighting the interactions between dramatic and non-dramatic publications on the bookstalls. This case study also draws attention to the responsiveness of publishers to the practices of neighbouring stationers, and the ways in which particular areas of London could become associated with certain authors or types of publication, as suggested by the significant Shakespearean concentration between the signs of the Angel and White Greyhound. Indeed, the breakdown of the connections between Wise, George Carey, and Shakespeare in 1603 (through Wise's disappearance from historical records and Carey's death), and the dissipation of the center for Shakespearean wholesale in Paul's Cross Churchyard (through the movements of stationers) could be significant factors in explaining the decrease in Shakespearean first editions in the Jacobean period. Examining paratextual attributions can therefore be seen as a fruitful

starting point for exploring a range of aspects connected to the transmission and publication of texts, beyond the immediate issue of authorship.

My article, “At the Sign of the Angel: The influence of Andrew Wise on Shakespeare in print,” in *Shakespeare Survey* 71 (2018) explores several of the issues discussed here in greater detail. This shorter version is presented with kind permission of Peter Holland.

¹ *Locrine*, published in 1595, contains a title-page attribution to “W.S.,” which could be taken to suggest Shakespeare, although the ascription is far from unambiguous and does not convey the same clarity of authorship as the editions from 1598.

² Cf. Peter W. M. Blayney, “The Publication of Playbooks,” in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 383-422 and Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³ Wise published *Richard II* in 1597 (Q1), 1598 (Q2) and 1598 (Q3); *Richard III* in 1597 (Q1), 1598 (Q2) and 1602 (Q3); *1 Henry IV* in 1598 (Q0, for which only one sheet survives), 1598 (Q1) and 1599 (Q2); *2 Henry IV* in 1600 (Q1), and *Much Ado About Nothing* in 1600 (Q1).

⁴ Sonia Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 91-105.

⁵ See Adam G. Hooks, ‘Shakespeare at the White Greyhound’, *Shakespeare Survey* 64 (2011), 260-75; Kathleen E. McLuskie, ‘The Poets’ Royal Exchange: Patronage and Commerce in Early Modern Drama’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 21 (1991), 53-63.

⁶ Details of stationer locations and bookshop proximity are from Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Bookshops in Paul’s Cross Churchyard*, Occasional Papers of the Bibliographic Society, No. 5 (London: Bibliographical Society, 1990), 76.

⁷ This attribution appears on the title page of the second edition of *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599. No copies of the first-edition title page are extant.